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SMALL VS. LARGE COLLEGES[†]

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Mr. President, and Ladies and Gentlemen: Professor Park, of Andover, used to divide one's theological holdings into two classes—those for which a man would go to the stake, and those for which a man would not go to the stake. I announce in advance that I am not prepared to go to the stake on the size of a college. The discussion which I am asked to open has, however, a certain educational interest, and the discussion may run out into questions of educational importance.

I note at the beginning that there are two conditions which have created and which still maintain the small college, which are not strictly educational. The small college exists today in certain localities for strictly social reasons, or is built up under social conditions. Oxford and Cambridge exist primarily in the forms in which they exist to conserve the social order of England. The process of selection is a very careful process, as you well know, beginning in the great public schools of England, but carried on with very great care as men draw near the different colleges; and once there the process is continued with the same extreme solicitude. I think that of the present Liberal cabinet of twenty-two men, eleven are graduates from Oxford and five from Balliol, and presumably the others, with the exception of John Burns, are graduates from other English universities. When Dr. Caird left his chair of philosophy in Scotland to take the place of Dr. Jowett, the controlling motive, as I understand through Professor George H. Palmer, was that he might continue the prestige of Balliol in making Balliol men rulers of India, and the process is not so much by teaching them philosophy as he taught it in Scotland as in meeting some one man every day, primarily in English composition, but with a view to personal influence.

The second condition which creates and maintains the small college, acting on the same principle, is the religious condition. The various denominations in this country have established colleges for two reasons: some of them to develop the intellectual standard of the denomination, and some of them to preserve, as they think it necessary, the more strict religious character of education. I visited not long since a New England

[†] Read before the New England Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools, October, 1906.

college established not more than forty years ago to develop the intellectual character of the religious community with which the college was connected. The work has been very notably done. We are quite familiar with colleges which are still held to preserve the religious character of education according to the desire of those who control.

Now, whether colleges are established to conserve certain social conditions, as in England, or whether they are established to meet certain religious conditions, as in the newer parts of this country, the very object for which they are established limits the number of students. A college established to meet a certain social order must adjust itself in numbers to that end, and very few colleges outgrow specifically religious control for specifically religious ends by any very large proportion of numbers.

I have mentioned these two conditions that we may set them aside in the discussion of this question, presuming that the discussion of this question has to do entirely with that which is strictly educational. We are obliged, then, to reach the definition of the small college educationally. I know of but one definition which can be given, of but one reason which justifies the small college, considered in its purely educational life; and that is that every student shall come into immediate and constant contact with the mind of a master, one or many. The assumed advantage of the small college is that immaturity is under the constant impact of maturity. That, I suppose, is what all our older graduates mean when they speak of the college of their time, unless their minds happen to be specially inflamed at the time either by electives or by athletics. That, I suppose, is what Mr. Charles Francis Adams means very largely in his discussion of the small college—the recognition of the one fact that men are taught, according to the conception of the small college, as every man comes under the immediate and constant influence of the master-mind, be that mind one or many, and that whenever you depart from that standard by introducing intermediate minds, minds in the intermediate stage of maturity, you have departed from the essential idea of the small college and that which alone justifies its existence. There are fifteen or twenty departments of instruction, as you may reckon, in a college curriculum. That would require as many professors of full standing. They might have a certain amount of assistance. But the principle holds rigidly that under any definition of the small college the number of students shall not exceed that number which can be reached definitely and continuously by men in full standing in instruction. The moment you depart from that definition I do not know that you have any definition whatever that determines the number of the small college.

Accepting this, then, as the definition of the small college, we are met at once by the fact that the small college in a democracy is no longer practicable. The small college of the sort which I have described can exist only by exception, cannot exist as the prevailing type—for two reasons: because of its cost financially, and because of its cost in democratic principles. It cannot exist as the prevailing type because of its cost financially. It will require a very great and a very constant duplication of the college plant; and today the college plant is a very large and a very costly affair, consisting of far more than the aggregate of the salaries of the best instructors. When the equipment of a college is reckoned with, and the cost of duplicating that equipment to make a college, say, of three hundred men or women, you at once see that the cost far exceeds any probability of realization. And we are to remember that in reckoning the cost of collegiate instruction we come back after all to the standard which is set by the state colleges and universities; for they rest upon taxation, and taxation determines very largely the grade of expense. We may have our largely and richly endowed colleges and universities, but still the principle comes back practically to the cost, which in one form or another is represented by taxation. We cannot get very far beyond the limit which our people will bear in direct or indirect taxation for the support of colleges and universities.

The small college, as the prevailing type to which I have referred, is impracticable today when considered with reference to democratic principles. How are you to hold a college at the number which the small college represents? It must be in one of three ways. It must be by lifting the standard so that only a portion of those prepared by the public-school system to enter college can enter. That would create in time an aristocracy of a certain type of scholarship. You may limit it through the increase of the cost of instruction by increasing tuition. That in time would allow only the sons of rich men. You may limit it by reducing the accommodations which can be provided in one way or another for students, and there again you reach precisely the same end. It is a very much more difficult thing, ladies and gentlemen, to reduce a college than it is to enlarge a college, and do the work consistently. I do not understand how a college under the natural laws of growth can be reduced, except in violation of some one of the principles of a democracy, the college itself existing under the incentives and under the development of a democracy. Whichever way one turns for a method, one is confronted by the very serious cost of those democratic principles which are building up our colleges, and for which our colleges in large measure exist.

If you ask in this connection the question whether too many are not

seeking a college education, I am of two minds in that matter. I believe that every boy, even though he may have the disadvantage of certain social distractions, ought to have the chance of college life. I am equally of the opinion that any such young fellow ought to pass under very severe tests in working out his chance. I would not discriminate against the boy who is sent to college for social reasons, provided he is prepared to enter; but once there I would hold him to rigid conditions of college work; I would use the pruning-knife freely. But I believe that we must give the chance clearly and equally to all, without respect to rich or poor. Just now the tendency, almost necessarily, is to shut the college in the face of the rich man's son; that is, we shut the college in the face of the man who is supposed to be there without a purpose, in distinction from the man who comes there with a purpose. I would be careful how we shut the door in the face of any man, but I would be very careful that we allow no man once within to loaf on his chance. I would give him a quick, fair chance, and then I would have done with him. The only way in which we can deal fairly in a democracy is to deal precisely with the son of one man as we would deal with the son of another, provided both meet the conditions of entrance; but, once within, the same principle must hold good, and it must cut resolutely and squarely all round. So that, while I think too many today are coming to colleges under purely social incentives—some for the sake of representing social advance on the part of the family, some to get a larger amount of social enjoyment—I believe that this trouble can be very quickly cured if our colleges see to it that no man, from whatever motive he may have come, finds any place for sheer loafing.

How now have we really met the difficulty which confronts us in our principles and methods of education as related to college life? We have admitted our ideal as to what college training should be. We found that ideal as represented by the small college of the type to which I have referred impracticable in a democracy. What have we been doing, and what are we doing, to meet that difficulty? We have met it in one way, and we are beginning to meet it in another way. The two ways will probably run parallel until they work themselves out. We have met the difficulty, first, by merging the college in the university; that is, we have allowed our colleges to make a somewhat heterogeneous growth. We have not asked too many educational questions as they have been on the way to growth, but have studied economy, and the aggregation of undergraduate life and of professional life and of graduate life has been allowed. In some places it has been the result of more careful study than in other places, but the aggregation has taken place, and the college has been in very many instances

under the pressure of numbers merged in the university, and has taken university methods. University methods of instruction have prevailed, and university methods pertaining to social conduct have prevailed.

Now, it goes without saying that there are certain advantages in this method. No one can shut his eyes to them. The university ought to be the place where there are more master-minds than can be found anywhere else. The university ought to be the place where there is a larger increase than anywhere else in the motive power of teaching. If there are more master-minds there, and if those master-minds are incited by research as well as by teaching, there ought to be an undefined intellectual stimulus coming from that body of men; there ought to be a fine intellectual atmosphere associated with the university, whatever may be the specific objects toward which instruction is directed; and there ought to be, and I think there is, a certain influence coming from the simple power of numbers. We have virtually turned the argument about, so that, whereas in the small college a man working in a group was incited by his group, we have now said that we will take the risk of overpowering a man by numbers, that he may gain somewhere out of the multitude the stimulus for himself personally.

The essential difficulty, as I find it, in this method of training as applied to undergraduate life, is that the university is purely and simply individualistic as an educational power. It must be so. It seeks in all possible ways to find out the individual man, and it seeks in all possible ways to give that individual man most perfect freedom. If he does not use his freedom rightly, let him go. The whole basis of university training is and must be purely and simply individualistic. I do not believe that that basis of training will fit the average man of from eighteen to twenty-two. It will fit that same man afterward, should he go on, and it will fit the exceptional man within that period, and even perhaps earlier; but the average man coming up out of a democracy, I believe, needs to come under other influences than those of a purely stimulating individualistic form and expression.

We have come, then, to another method of dealing with this problem, and that method has been in the attempt to recover, so far as possible and practicable under present conditions, the original college idea. That attempt at recovery is expressing itself, so far as I can see, in these three forms: In the first place, it is greatly restricting, logically and educationally, the elective idea. Several universities have applied to undergraduate life what you know very well as the group system, which is a definite and clearly defined restriction of the elective system. It is far in principle as in method from the old prescribed system, but it does represent the attempt to recover

the college idea, in the fact that it puts a man under the stimulus of restricted, as well as under the stimulus of perfectly free and undefined, work.

The second form of this method is in the attempt which is being made to enlarge and develop the teaching force, with the view to very much closer teaching. This, I suppose, is the Princeton system, of which we shall hear tonight, with which we are familiar in some of its aspects. But the whole aim and end of it, or at least the evident aim and end of it, is to bring about what I have termed closer teaching—that teaching which represents the impact of one trained mind near enough to be in sympathy with the minds upon which it acts. Compare undergraduate life, say, at the University of Columbia, and undergraduate life at Princeton, and you see the very marked distinction between the methods as they are at work today.

And the third attempt is in the building-up of what I may term the independent college, that is, the college where undergraduate life is somewhat distinct and separate, or at least in overpowering force, as compared with graduate and professional life. The real question, it seems to me, is, after all—when you leave the question of method and enter upon questions of external condition or of numerical value—whether you will have your undergraduate body by itself or existing in the university in rather overpowering force, as at Princeton, and perhaps at Yale; or whether you will have the university idea overpowering the undergraduate or collegiate idea. As you rate your two ideas in this respect, you see the significance, I think, of the attempt which is being made to hold the college idea in its integrity by developing undergraduate life to the largest possible extent which the first academic degree allows, insisting that before a man crosses the A. B. or B. S. line he shall have filled out the conception of those degrees to the full, and that he shall do it under conditions which represent not so much the individualistic idea as the more social and collective idea which the college of old time represented, and which the college idea stands permanently to represent. Certainly it is a question as befitting a very large class of men to whom that degree will be the only degree which they will receive. I have not the statistics before me; in fact, I never have carefully investigated the subject; but I think it is safe to say that before the decade is over more than half of all the undergraduates in men's colleges will receive the undergraduate degree as the only degree, that more than half will never go on to any second degree, and that half, and probably in increasing proportion, will represent the higher education in America. The question is with reference to the nature of the training for those men, as well as for men who are to go on to other and more advanced and more

distinct degrees. So that I believe that, in the second general attempt which is being made to illustrate the significance of the college idea itself, we are to keep continually in mind the fact that we are to make the college degree stand for its best, and to equip the man to the best advantage who goes on to take any subsequent degree.

I have simply, Mr. President, opened in the way of brief outline this question, not, as I conceive, as I said at the outset, one of the burning questions in our educational work, but a question which is one of very great interest; a question which can run out into questions of very much importance, which, as it may excite any discussion, I shall be happy to take part in later as the discussion may proceed.

[Following a discussion of the foregoing paper, President Tucker continued]: There is one party to this discussion that has not been heard from—the individual college. I think that a college is a thing of nature and grows according to its own laws. There are colleges that have for various reasons, growing out of history or of environment, or from some particular circumstance, a future which other colleges, having different traditions or a different environment, cannot expect. So that, whatever we may say about colleges, big or little, or however we may define colleges in various ways, it is the glory of our American institutions, especially the older ones, that each one has a very definite, and what is to it a very sacred, life of its own, and that it will act according to its own life; that it will abide in certain ideals, whatever men may say or not say, or that it will depart from certain accepted ideals, whatever men may say or may not say. The inherent power, in other words, lies in every strong institution in this country to do about as it has a mind to do, with due respect to the great and necessary laws of the higher education.

There is this also to be said in reference to the relative effect of the great institutions and the smaller institutions upon the instructor and upon the student. I think that in almost every way the advantage to the instructor lies in the greater institution, the stimulus which comes from great facilities and the stimulus which comes from contact with a sufficient number of minds working toward a certain well-defined and long end, and the stimulus which comes from great variety of interest. All of these various stimulating influences go to the instructor in the largest possible institution, so that I do not wonder that every instructor seeks the largest field, quite irrespective of any advance in salary, because of certain facilities and associations which are personally and professionally helpful to him. It does not follow by any means that the same condition acts upon the student. Our institutions of learning are more than institutions of learning; and, as

a fact, they affect students in other ways and quite as influentially as in the effect which they produce upon them as scholars. The scholar pure and simple has his advantages commensurate with those of the instructor in the great schools; but those influences which somehow work upon a man to stimulate his personal ambitions and to lead him toward a very high personal career, outside scholarship, do, as a matter of fact, according to the history of this country, seem to take effect, I do not know how or why, in smaller institutions. I am surprised to find that there is not an institution in the West, South, anywhere, so small that it has not produced one or more men of very great national importance, it may be of tremendous national importance; and it seems to me—I may overestimate it—that a large proportion of men of national importance have come from very small institutions. So that I think that we cannot reason in precisely the same way as to the effect of a great institution, with its equipment and all its stimulating power coming from intercourse, upon the instructor and upon the student; for the student, the average student, I will not say is impervious to all those influences, but they do not affect him in any such way as they affect the instructor himself. This effect of a certain kind of provincialism on certain minds is so marked in history, in the history of the provincial nations as compared with the history of the great nations, it is so marked in literature, and it is so marked in politics, that there is a subtle law somewhere that we have not touched upon, and which we are not reaching when we are discussing this whole question purely in the light of scholarship. I think the relation of the university to the instructor is a very different thing from the relation of the university or the college of one size or another upon the student himself. He somehow finds out the influences that make and that start him on a great career in very unexpected places and from very unexpected sources.

As to the social conditions in colleges, I quite agree with what has been said, that you may expect moralizing influences from restrictions that never take effect, and that you may expect demoralizing influences from widening associations that do not take effect. I think that the mere question of environment is a very small and a very impracticable way of judging of the moral effect of an institution. If an institution is not true enough and big enough in its moral outlook and in all its conception of education to affect men directly and vitally itself, it cannot get off by itself into any narrow environment where it can do the business. If it is vital, it cannot lose itself if it gets into any great environment. It lies in the life itself of the institution. That tells the story every minute upon the men. If it is good, the men feel it; if it is indifferent, the men suffer from the lack

of moral power. The questions of environment and of bigness and smallness, all of those things, seem to me to be very indifferent questions in treating of the social life, so far as we attempt to describe it as a moral life.

In answer to the question which Mr. Knox has put, I wish that there was something in our American life which might give us a clue to the practicability of the subdivision of great institutions, by which the traditions of those institutions could be preserved, and at the same time so diffused through separate organizations as to give the advantage of the English college. I looked in vain for practical suggestions in that direction in Mr. Adams' address, although his mind seemed to work quite strongly in that direction. I have failed to see how Harvard, or Yale, or any of the older and greater universities, could be subdivided in that way, and I have failed to see how distinct institutions could start under one great endowment by a mechanical device. Suppose any man who wanted to endow an institution with \$20,000,000 should say: "I will give \$5,000,000 to one of four colleges to start with." I do not know whether it would work or not. I can see that, if there could be any possibility by which men could combine, or by which any group of colleges could grow up out of the sacrifices of the old time, and be so mutually related that they would have a common tradition and yet individual traditions, we might get the result; but how to unload all that Harvard carries in its unit in such a way as to distribute properly, giving this portion and that portion to any separate body, I cannot quite see. Nor can I see any better how we can start from separate roots, except by properly spacing them in time, so that each would have the opportunity in a new institution to get its own proper setting. I should like to see the experiment tried. I wish it were possible to realize something of that great advantage which the English institutions have.